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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0314  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000147

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN THAILAND: JUNE 2009 MOSQUE SHOOTING  
SUSPECT TURNS SELF IN

REF: 09 BANGKOK 1508 (JUNE 8 MOSQUE ATTACK)

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Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Sutthirak Kongsuwan, the prime suspect in the June 8, 2009 shooting at the Al Furqon mosque in Narathiwat, turned himself into Thai police on January 14 after months of pressure from Democrat Party politicians on security forces for progress in the case. Authorities announced that Sutthirak is wanted in two additional shootings which took place in late 2008, linked to the same weapon via ballistics analysis. Police suspect four other people were also involved in the shooting -- which killed ten and has hampered reconciliation efforts in the South -- but only two arrest warrants have been issued. Thai authorities have not yet announced a timeline for legal procedures against Sutthirak.

¶2. (C) Comment: Democrat MPs worried about their prospects in the deep south in the next general election provided political pressure for progress in the mosque shooting, according to various insider accounts. Although some observers will be quick to hail this development as a significant step towards accountability and reconciliation in the south, Sutthirak's detention alone does not necessarily herald an improvement in the southern situation. How the Royal Thai Government (RTG) approaches the prosecution of Sutthirak's case, in conjunction with pursuit of the other suspects in the case, will prove more significant than the actual arrest itself. The Malay Muslim population in the South has been very patient over the last seven months regarding this case, adopting a wait and see attitude. Sutthirak's surrender alone appears to have accomplished little in changing local perceptions of unequal justice, but a conviction would help begin to chip away at the deeply seeded mistrust in the south. End Summary and Comment.

ALLEGED SHOOTER TURNS SELF IN  
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¶3. (C) On January 14, Sutthirak Kongsuwan, the former paramilitary ranger who police say led the attack on the Al Furqon mosque in Narathiwat Province on June 8, turned

himself into police in Narathiwat. Sutthirak was also wanted on two other warrants related to two murders in Narathiwat in late 2008; ballistics linked the three attacks to a single AK-47 and to him, according to Police Maj. Gen. Saritchai Venakavieng, head of investigations for Region Four, based in Yala. Saritchai told us in August that although six people participated in the attack that killed ten and wounded 12, the police only had sufficient evidence to issue arrest warrants for two - Sutthirak and Lukman Latehbuering. Lukman, a Malay Muslim and the alleged spotter and getaway driver for the attack, remains in hiding.

¶4. (C) Police MGEN Surachai Suebsuk, commander of the Narathiwat Provincial Police, told us in October there was insufficient evidence to issue warrants for the remaining three suspects; one person connected to the case apparently committed suicide in the interim. MGEN Saritchai told us in August that of the five weapons used in the mosque shooting -- two M-16s, two shotguns, and one AK-47 -- ballistics results positively tied the AK-47 to Suttirak and the 2008 murders.

WHERE HAS HE BEEN FOR SEVEN MONTHS?  
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¶5. (C) Press reports noted that Sutthirak was an ex-ranger (in Thai: thahan phran) who had been dismissed after allegations that he was involved in a drug case. His alleged affiliation with current security forces, and his whereabouts in the interim, is a matter of some dispute. Sutthirak was an active member of the Village Protection Volunteers (also known by their Thai acronym, Or Ror Bor), an armed neighborhood watch-style program organized by Deputy Royal Aide-de-Camp GEN Naphol Boonthap under the auspices of Queen

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Sirikit, many of our interlocutors on the South claimed to us in the months since the mosque attack. However, MGEN Saritchai disputed this charge in August, asserting that Sutthirak was not an Or Ror Bor member but had enjoyed military protection because of his status as an informant.

¶6. (C) Don Pathan (strictly protect), a reporter for The Nation newspaper with excellent southern connections and regular Embassy contact, told us January 19 that his sources alleged that five of the six suspects were detained by police shortly after the shooting, but that GEN. Naphol intervened to have them released from police custody and then moved them to a safehouse in Bangkok. Police officials in Narathiwat, however, told us January 19 that they had no information about the suspects being held by police.

¶7. (C) Chaoyong Maneerungsakul (strictly protect), a reporter for the Thai-language Daily News based in Hat Yai, alleged to us in December that Sutthirak had been protected by the military after the shooting and stayed at Chulaphorn Camp in Narathiwat Province after his involvement became known.

INSURGENTS NOT AS PATIENT AS LOCAL CITIZENS?  
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¶8. (C) In October 2009, insurgents issued bounties for the six people presumed associated with the Al Furqon mosque attack. The leaflets included information such as home addresses and national ID card numbers, information that Narathiwat MGEN Surachai claimed to us at the time was leaked from the local police station. The insurgents placed a price of one million baht (US\$30,400) on Sutthirak and bounties of 500,000 baht (US\$15,200) for five other people, including Lukman.

¶9. (C) Hajji Abdullozak Ali, the Chairman of the Narathiwat Islamic Committee, told us in August that Muslims in Narathiwat were willing to give Thai authorities time to resolve the case, but noted that insurgents had warned him that they would not accept the arrest of a scapegoat.

Phaisan Toyib, president of the Islamic Private School Association in Narathiwat, said that southern residents were willing to be patient with Thai authorities as they worked on this case, but added that they expected the law to be fairly and justly applied. Phaisan also said that most people in Narathiwat thought the shooting was an act of revenge and not officially sanctioned by the Thai Government.

¶10. (C) Sunai Phasuk (strictly protect), a researcher for Human Rights Watch who has excellent contacts with security forces as well as within the insurgent movement, told us January 15 that insurgents did not react positively to the news of Sutthirak's surrender. Elder members of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (National Revolutionary Front, or BRN) indicated that the government lacked sincerity in dealing with the Malay Muslims and that they would not call off insurgent attacks in the wake of Sutthirak's surrender. Sunai also expressed doubt to us that, even if the Attorney General's Office presented the case to the court, it would be handled in a timely manner.

JOHN